



The Historical Society of Orange Park

October 2026 Newsletter

Fall is here and with it comes some of the most beautiful weather of the year! To help you take advantage of the season, the Historical Society has several upcoming events for you to enjoy. In this issue of the newsletter, we highlight our monthly Clarke House open houses, our upcoming Quarterly Member Meeting, Moonlight on Magnolia and our Veterans Day Ceremony. We also share the stories of the Parmenter-Heinrich House and two previously unrecognized veterans in Magnolia Cemetery.



We hope you enjoy the newsletter!

Calendar of Events

Date	Time	Event	Location
October 11, 2026	2:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Open House	Clarke House
October 14, 2026	9:00 AM – 5:00 PM	Patriotic Celebration	Historic Triangle, Green Cove Springs
October 19, 2026	6:00 PM – 7:30 PM	Quarterly Member Meeting	Orange Park Library
October 24, 2026	4:00 PM – 6:00 PM	Moonlight on Magnolia	Magnolia Cemetery
November 8, 2026	2:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Open House	Clarke House
November 11, 2026	11:00 AM – 12:00 PM	Veterans Day Ceremony	Veterans Memorial
December 12 & 13, 2026	5:00 PM – 9:00 PM	Hometown Holiday	Clarke House Park

Quarterly Member Meeting: An Armchair Tour of Some Special Orange Park Residents

Join us for a special presentation on Monday, October 19th at 6 PM at the Orange Park Library, 2054 Plainfield Avenue as we travel through history from the comfort of a chair. Learn the stories of some of the colorful, past residents of the Orange Park community, told by a variety of different voices. This presentation will allow folks who are not comfortable walking around the cemetery a chance to hear about these individuals with a visual backdrop. Featured will be the Harrington family with its racing car and hospitality stories, John Nelson, a founding member of the Society and all-around colorful character and we will also highlight several veterans buried in Magnolia Cemetery.

This meeting will also serve as our Annual Meeting featuring the election of officers for the coming year so we appreciate a large gathering of members for that. All positions are open for you to consider. If you wish

to stand for election to a specific office, please be ready to provide a short statement as to why those gathered should choose you for that role. For more information, contact us at info@ophistory.org.

Get the SCOOP...

The Historical Society will offer presentations at 9:00 AM, each Monday morning through November 16, for the Shepherd's Center of Orange Park (SCOOP). The presentations will be conducted at the Orange Park Methodist Church Family Life Center, 2042 Reed St., Orange Park, FL 32073.

Registration is required. Please visit the Shepherd's Center of Orange Park's website at <https://www.tscoop.org/> for more information. To register for the Historical Society's SCOOP presentations, and other Monday classes, visit <https://www.tscoop.org/monday-classes/>.



The topics below will be explored along with backstories that will illuminate and educate:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Presenter</u>
October 5	<i>Orange Park Normal & Industrial School</i>	Van Hogan
October 19	<i>Celebrating the Town Fathers (and Mothers)?</i>	Sandra DiGiovanni
October 26	<i>In the Line of Duty: Clay Counties Fallen Sheriffs</i>	Bob Scallan
November 2	<i>Via Who? What You'll Love to Know about the Tisdelles</i>	Sandra DiGiovanni
November 9	<i>Orange Park's Monkey Farm</i>	Cynthia Cheatwood
November 16	<i>The Winter That Took the Orange Out of Orange Park</i>	Van Hogan

Moonlight on Magnolia is Almost Here!

Our annual historical walks through Magnolia Cemetery will be held on October 24th with the first of several tours starting at 4:00 PM. The final tour will commence at approximately 6:00 PM. This event needs volunteers to help at the front table and to help spread the word to the people. If you are a member of another organization or group, please feel free to share this information with your members. If you like to walk and talk and are interested in serving as a guide, this might be your perfect chance to join us. It's a wonderful way to learn local history while you share it with others. Contact Cindy Cheatwood, 904.707.0822, to join in, or to have any questions addressed.



Our general meeting at the Orange Park Library will feature some of the residents in Magnolia Cemetery that are not included in the Moonlight on Magnolia tour. The presentations for these individuals will be complemented by photographs and family accounts. See the Quarterly Member Meeting article above for more information.

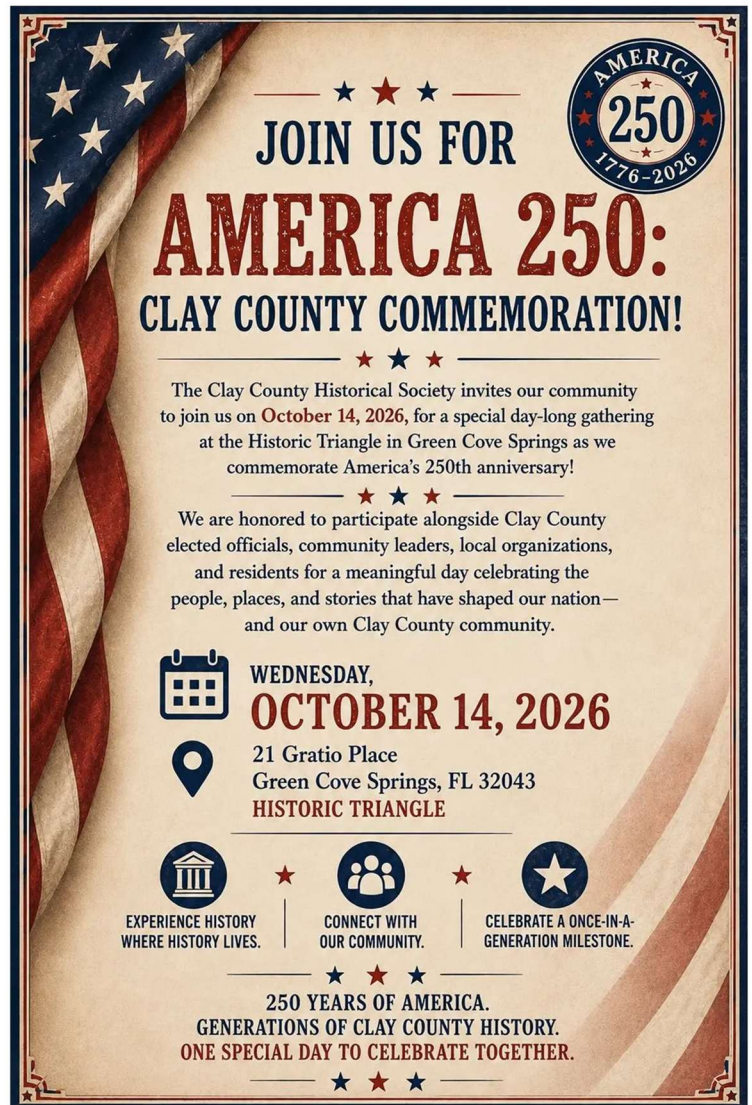
America 250 – Clay County Patriotic Celebration

You are cordially invited to join us Wednesday, Oct. 14, 2026, 9 AM – 5 PM at the Historic Triangle in Green Cove Springs, Florida as we commemorate America's 250th anniversary with a special day of patriotism, history, music, and community. Throughout the day, guests will enjoy live musical performances, food trucks and vendors, historical programming, and opportunities to come together as a community in recognition of this historic milestone. A special America 250 Commemorative Ceremony will be held at 2:50 in the afternoon, followed by a historic document signing inside the Historic Courthouse.

Why October 14?

On October 14, 1774, the First Continental Congress adopted the Declaration and Resolves, asserting the rights of the American colonies and declaring that colonists were entitled to "life, liberty and property." The principles expressed in this historic document foreshadowed those later articulated in the Declaration of Independence and marked an important step in the movement toward American independence.

We would be honored to have you join us as Clay County commemorates 250 years of the American story. For more information, visit <https://www.claycountygov.com/community/america-250-clay-county>.



JOIN US FOR
AMERICA 250:
CLAY COUNTY COMMEMORATION!

The Clay County Historical Society invites our community to join us on **October 14, 2026**, for a special day-long gathering at the Historic Triangle in Green Cove Springs as we commemorate America's 250th anniversary!

We are honored to participate alongside Clay County elected officials, community leaders, local organizations, and residents for a meaningful day celebrating the people, places, and stories that have shaped our nation—and our own Clay County community.

WEDNESDAY,
OCTOBER 14, 2026

21 Gratio Place
Green Cove Springs, FL 32043
HISTORIC TRIANGLE

EXPERIENCE HISTORY WHERE HISTORY LIVES. | CONNECT WITH OUR COMMUNITY. | CELEBRATE A ONCE-IN-A-GENERATION MILESTONE.

250 YEARS OF AMERICA.
GENERATIONS OF CLAY COUNTY HISTORY.
ONE SPECIAL DAY TO CELEBRATE TOGETHER.

Friend of the Historical Society, By Bob Scallan

In newsletter editions late last year, we shared the remarkable story of discovering a Pearl Harbor and USS *Arizona* survivor—Navy Seaman Arthur Gilbert—buried in Magnolia Cemetery without a military marker. This important piece of history came to light thanks to Arthur's son, Denis Gilbert, who contacted the Historical Society and entrusted us with his father's legacy.

On September 21st, Denis passed away after a short battle with cancer. He lived alone, accompanied for many years by his beloved dog, who also passed away earlier this year. Denis devoted several days each week to serving with the James Boys, repairing bicycles to be donated to children and families in need throughout our community.

Denis became a true friend of the Historical Society. He generously shared several historical artifacts from his personal collection and often stopped by with stories, questions, and discoveries. At times he was eccentric, at others delightfully quirky—but always sincere. Above all, Denis was deeply grateful for the December 7th ceremony honoring his father, a ceremony that allowed both him and our community to remember a genuine World War II hero.

Please keep Denis in your thoughts as we remember a man who cared deeply about history, service, and preserving the memory of those who came before us.



A Brief History of Veterans Day, By Bob Scallan

Veterans Day began as Armistice Day, marking the moment the First World War ended on November 11, 1918, when the guns finally fell silent across Europe. What started as a tribute to those who served in “the war to end all wars” evolved in 1954 into Veterans Day, a national observance honoring all American veterans—those who served in times of war and peace, those who returned home, and those who continue to shape our communities with their quiet strength and enduring sense of duty.

Unlike Memorial Day, which honors the fallen, Veterans Day celebrates the living legacy of service. It is a day to recognize the men and women who stepped forward when their country called, and who carried those values into their families, workplaces, and hometowns long after their military years.

Across the nation, communities gather on November 11th to reflect, remember, and give thanks. Here in Orange Park, the Historical Society proudly continues that tradition with a ceremony that blends solemn remembrance with heartfelt community participation.

This year’s Veterans Day Ceremony will feature a flyover by the Dreamland Squadron, a stirring reminder of the aviation heritage that has long been tied to our nation’s defense. The First Coast Highlanders Bagpipes and Drum Corps will perform, adding their unmistakable sound to the morning’s tribute. Our speakers include the DAR Regent, City of Orange Park Vice Mayor Doug Benefield, and our keynote speaker, Navy veteran Dr. Suzette Cudjoe-Howard Johnson, each offering reflections on service, sacrifice, and the meaning of Veterans Day.

Students from local schools will read their winning Veterans Day essays, sharing the perspectives of a new generation learning to appreciate the cost of freedom. The ceremony will include the presentation of colors, followed by the solemn and timeless closing tradition—the playing of Taps.

Together, these elements create a ceremony that honors not only the history of Veterans Day, but the veterans of Clay County whose stories continue to inspire us.

Veterans Day Ceremony

The poster features a top section with a photograph of five uniformed veterans in dress uniforms standing behind a row of flags, including the American flag and several military service flags. The background of the entire poster is a soft-focus image of a cemetery with white headstones under a sunset sky. A silhouette of a soldier in uniform playing a trumpet is visible in the lower-left corner.

*HONOR
★
REMEMBER
★
THANK
All Who Served*

HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF ORANGE PARK

VETERANS DAY

★ CEREMONY ★

Honoring Those Who Served

 **WEDNESDAY
NOVEMBER 11TH**

 **11:00 AM**

 **MAGNOLIA CEMETERY**
1040 Kingsley Ave.
Orange Park, FL 32073

 **PARKING AT
FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH**
1140 Kingsley Ave.
Orange Park, FL 32073

Strongly suggest you bring your own chair.

★ **SPEAKERS** ★

DAR Regent Carol Westermann
Town of Orange Park Vice Mayor Doug Benefield
Keynote Speaker
Dr. Suzette Cudjoe-Hodge Johnson

 **DREAMLAND
SQUADRON FLYOVER**

 **FIRST COAST
HIGHLANDERS
BAGPIPES AND DRUMS**

 **REFRESHMENTS
TO FOLLOW**

SOME GAVE ALL.
ALL GAVE
SOMETHING.
★

Taps

A FINAL SALUTE

Orange Park Memories, By Cindy Cheatwood**Parmenter-Heinrich House - 1724 Plainfield Avenue, Built 1900**

The Parmenter house was originally built by William E. Parmenter, an 1877 Harvard graduate who moved to Florida from West Cambridge, Mass, his birthplace. Mr. Parmenter bought 20 acres of land and grew fruit and vegetables in Orange Park. He lived alone until 1894 when he married Miss Ione Fisher. They started a family and their house grew along with the family. From 1909-1912, he was mayor of Orange Park.

Parmenter kept records of all kinds and maintained at least three daily journals. These have been preserved in the state archives in Tallahassee and can be viewed by appointment there. The boxes are a treasure trove of early voting ballots, agricultural notes and family mementos. They even contain scripts that the Parmenter's created for periodic productions presented to the community starring townsfolk as actors.



The house was purchased in 1952 by Dr. and Mrs. Edwin Paul Heinrich, founders of St. John's Country Day School. Dr. Heinrich immigrated to America during World War II from Germany, facing an no shortage of backlash in the states. Still, he persevered and was very successful. Following his death, the house was sold in 1993 to Reverends Robert and Linda Standifer, who were highly active in the community. They preserved the historical elements of the house and shared these with friends and neighbors. Bob Standifer was mayor of Orange Park from 2010-2011. The Standifer's were charter members of the Historical Society of Orange Park.



The 1884 map of Orange Park shows this lot as 15 acres completely planted with orange trees, no structures at all. The devastating freezes of the 1890s changed that. A sizable number of smaller lots were created as the area was replatted.

With over 2,200 square feet, this house has 5 bedrooms, 3.5 baths with sunny porches on three sides. Original wood floors and door hardware keep the historical character of the home, along with leaded glass windows and 4 fireplaces. It reflects the historical charm of Orange Park, Florida.

Veterans Corner, By Sandra DiGiovanni

For October, I am highlighting two veterans that are finally receiving recognition in Magnolia Cemetery. Most of you are familiar with my quest to provide military headstones for the 13 veterans in Magnolia Cemetery who have no markers. I have been successful in obtaining approval on 12 marker requests completed so far. This article features two Vietnam War veterans, Isaiah F. Matthews Jr. & Elvis Brady Jordan.

Though these two never served in the same location, similarities between the two are numerous. Both were born in 1944, Isaiah in Houston, Texas and Elvis in Flint, Michigan. Named after their fathers, each man enlisted in the United States Navy. Elvis enlisted June 12, 1962, in Little Rock, Arkansas, Isaiah enlisted January 29, 1961, in Houston, Texas.

Isaiah Matthews remained in the U.S. Navy for over 20 years. His service took him from Texas to Alaska to deployment on the USS Ranger during the Vietnam War. During his exemplary career, Isaiah received the Navy & Marine Corps Commendation Medal at least 4 times for Meritorious Service during his 20+ years of service. His final station was Pensacola, Florida in 1987. In 1985 his son, Isaiah F. Matthews III, enlisted in the United States Air Force at Pensacola. Isaiah & his wife then retired to Orange Park, buying a home in Grove Park in 1986. Sadly, he only enjoyed his retirement for a few years as he passed in 1990.



Elvis Jordan's Navy career was a little different. He had two separate service careers. He enlisted in 1962 becoming an airman and training to be an aviation electrician. By 1963 he was assigned to the Naval Aviation Technical Training Unit at NAS Jax. Elvis left the service in 1966 but re-enlisted in 1974, finally retiring in 1978. Elvis also received the Navy & Marine Corps Commendation Medal during both tours of duty. The first one came in 1965, awarded by the Secretary of the Navy for Heroic Service; his second one came during his second tour of duty in 1977 for Meritorious Service.

Although we are not sure of the year he settled in Orange Park, he and his family were living on McKee Avenue in 1984 and later purchased property in Middleburg, where his widow still resides. Elvis too died at an early age in 1991. It is sad their retirement years could not have been longer.

Elvis' headstone is being manufactured, so there is no photo yet.

Community Night at Firehouse Subs

The Society would like to thank the Firehouse Subs on Kingsley Avenue for inviting us to earn a little money to help with the Society's finances. Held on Tuesday, September 22nd, a portion of the sales that evening was presented to the Historical Society for the support of our missions to preserve the history of Orange Park. We are grateful to those who came in support of the Society. We enjoyed the fine conversation and fellowship that was shared. Thank you to everyone who came out.

Celebrate the 904!

On September 4th, the Society hosted a booth at the Orange Park Mall along with 31 other nonprofits as part of the 904's telephone exchange area celebration. We shared our table with the Clay County Historical Society, and John Bowles made friends with everyone he met. Joseph Lorentzon, son of Sarah Boe, an old friend of the Society, surprised everyone with a gift of old newspapers and other objects that had been among Sarah's things. Dating back as far as the 1960s, these will be added to the growing collection of local artifacts. Some of the items were shared with the Clay County Society as well as the Middleburg Museum, who had a table near ours.



Clarke Cottage Is Back! You Must Come See! By Cindy Cheatwood

The renovation of Clarke Cottage is complete! The air conditioning system sponsored by the Society is not yet installed but the quotes are in and so it should not be long now. Our October 11 Open House will give the public their first chance to take a step back to 1925 and the home of Clarke's Pecan Grove worker. The Society has been busy setting up the space to be public-friendly and welcome visitors!



On September 19th, a Cottage-Warming Shower was held so that members got a first look at the wonderful job the Town did in honoring the historical elements of the Cottage. You must see it for yourself! The shower included authentic party items and the all-too-realistic lack of AC. This precluded our being able to enjoy group activities, but everyone enjoyed wandering through the house and checking out the historical postings prepared by the Society. These are still being installed so even partygoers should come to the October Open House to see the new installations.

The Society is very grateful to the Town Council, the Public Works department and members who have helped us get to this point. Clarke Cottage is a true historical asset in Orange Park.

2027 Membership Offer

The Historical Society of Orange Park is offering these Early Bird Specials as part of our 2027 Membership Drive:

Renew or Join, now through December 31, 2026

- **Family Early Bird Specials** on annual 2027 Membership
 - Senior Family Membership: \$15 (regularly \$20)
 - Family Membership: \$30 (regularly \$35)
- Join (or Renew) at the regular rate, **now** and **your annual membership will be extended through December 31, 2027.**



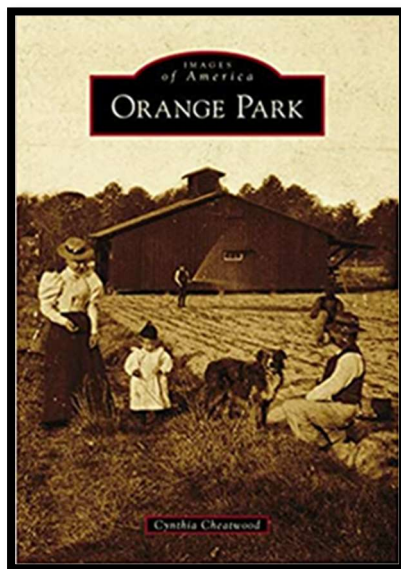
Click <https://ophistory.org/join-us-store> to take advantage of these end-of-year deals.

Look For Us Online

Look for the Historical Society of Orange Park online via our website, www.ophistory.org, our Instagram page, (<https://www.instagram.com/historicalsocietyorangepark>) or our Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/search/top?q=historical%20society%20of%20orange%20park>). Both sources provide updates on society news and activities.

Images of America: Orange Park

Images of America: Orange Park, authored by Historical Society President, Cynthia Cheatwood, is a wonderful way to learn about the history of Orange Park. This book shares the history of our town through archival photographs and stories collected from a variety of sources. The cost of the book is \$20 for members of our Society, \$25 for non-members and \$27 for online orders.



Clarke House Tours

Historic Clarke House Tours are held the second Sunday of each month from 2 PM to 4 PM. A quiet Sunday afternoon is the perfect time for a leisurely tour of the house, both up- and downstairs. It's free and guided by members of the Historical Society of Orange Park. Private Guided Tours are available to homeschool, civic and social groups! To schedule a free guided tour, contact the Historical Society of Orange Park at info@ophistory.org. Groups will be scheduled based on the availability of guides.



Upcoming Open House Dates:

- October 11
- November 8

Links to Local History

For more events, activities and information related to local history, please visit the following:

- Camp Blanding Museum
- Clay County Archives
- Clay County Historical Society
- Historical Society of Penny Farms
- Keystone Heights Heritage Commission
- Mandarin Museum and Historical Society
- Middleburg Museum
- Military Museum of North Florida

Visit <https://ophistory.org/local-interest> for links to these organizations.

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